

PRACTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Volume 3

May-June 1956

Number 3

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EDITORIAL REMARKS

With this issue, editorial responsibility for Practical Anthropology changes hands. Robert Taylor has an opportunity to do anthropological field work and has asked to be relieved of editorial responsibilities for the duration of his stay abroad. He would prefer not to be remembered as editor at all during this period while he is not taking direct responsibility for PA, but it is only fitting that he should, for PA is what Bob Taylor made it, and we are expecting him to take over again when he gets back.

Readers will be interested to know that there are over 275 paid subscribers to Practical Anthropology, more than some of us would have thought possible when it was founded. The subscribers consist principally of missionaries and of teachers and students of anthropology. Subscriptions have been just enough to pay for expenses (with all labor except that of the actual multi-lith presswork volunteered) this last year. Costs of publishing in the New York area will apparently be some higher, so we are hoping for more subscriptions to come in! More about that later in the issue.

The Interim Editor is making an inauspicious start by featuring an article from his own pen in the first issue! The task of soliciting articles takes time, however, and we are busily trying to get some lined up for later issues. Our Reviews Editor will try to encourage someone to do a review for each issue, and the News Editor will turn sleuth, as most readers seem too bashful to volunteer the necessary information. But please don't wait for him to ask you -- let him know when something of anthropological interest happens to you.

If we were sticklers for protocol we would have a nice little problem with our Associate Editor. The Interim Editor is Associate Secretary in the American Bible Society under the Associate Editor of PA! Actually, it simply means that we will continue to work as a team, but the Associate Editor will be spared any unnecessary responsibility for PA unless he sends the

Interim Editor off on a trip somewhere, and then if PA falls in his lap it is his own fault.

The Editorial Committee will continue to serve in the same advisory capacity that it had for Robert Taylor. Although we will turn to it with our questions and problems, we would most certainly appreciate the guidance of the rest of the subscribers to PA as well. We want your ideas, your criticisms, your articles, your reviews, your news, your letters (not to speak of your gift subscriptions). We would also most sincerely appreciate your prayers.

W.A.S.

Correction

We regret that a copying error made the last sentence on page 19 of the last issue of Practical Anthropology meaningless. It should read: "While the Christian liberal arts college is dedicated to training Christian psychologists, geologists, chemists, educators, coaches, etc., the Bible Institute or Bible College is interested in training pastors, missionaries, church musicians, or educators for Christian day schools and mission schools."

THE GOSPEL AND THE CULTURES OF LAOS

William A. Smalley

In northern Laos, which lies on the southern border of China between North Vietnam and Burma, three different ethnic groups have been particularly subject to missionary efforts. There are other ethnic groups in the country as well, local tribes and migrant minority populations like the Chinese, Indians, and Pakistanese, but their contact with the Gospel in North Laos has been more sporadic, and missionary work with them less systematic. The three groups which have had intensive evangelization present a very important problem in missionary anthropology, for in spite of the fact that in many cases the same individual missionaries work among the three groups, that much of the same mission stations serve them all, that the same mission policies apply, the differences in the response of the three groups to the Christian message are striking. And what is more, some of the usual assumptions about missionary work do not apply, at least on the surface. The only one of the three groups which has the Scriptures in its language is the least responsive. The one with the shortest contact with missionaries is the most responsive. The best results have been achieved in the cases where the missionaries did not know the language, where they used interpreters, or where preaching was in a language foreign to the listeners.

As Christians we feel that God does inject Himself into history and perform what we call "miracles." As anthropologists we are also aware that there are cultural reasons (complex though they may be) for differences between peoples. We want to study those cultural problems whether we consider them to be instruments of God's dealing with men or whether we consider them independent of or contrary to God's purpose for man. Although the problem of these three groups plagued me throughout my term as a missionary in Laos, I could not give detailed, systematic attention to it. There are some observations of a more general nature which can be made about them, and perhaps that will help to point up

something of the magnitude of the problem of presenting the Gospel to peoples of all cultures in such a way that it is relevant to the problems of each.

Culture A: The Lao

The Lao are the politically predominant people of Laos. They are of a general Thai pattern, and differ little in speech or culture from those Thai (Siamese) who live across the Mekong River or any other part of their mutual political border. The Lao live principally in the river valleys and cultivate both irrigated rice (in the general manner familiar for East Asia) and non-irrigated, mountain rice by a slash-and-burn technique. Lao communities are loosely structured politically and socially, but there is a deep-lying consistency to their patterns. Centuries of influence from other cultures have resulted in a thoroughly syncretic pattern with historical roots in India and China as well as in South-east Asia. But whatever the roots, it is thoroughly Lao now.

The Lao are devout Buddhists, but they are great fish and meat eaters, and they see no inconsistency there. Rituals stemming from the local animism are intermingled with rituals from India with no embarrassment. The resulting religious culture is a most fundamental part of Lao life, and most men spent a part of their boyhood in a monastery or pagoda where they were students or apprentice priests.

More modern influences from the West are not so fully assimilated. Western artifacts (flashlights, lamps, watches, cigarette lighters, some clothing, etc.) which fill a Lao need are assimilated and are to be found everywhere. (The Lao need for watches is often a need for jewelry, not for telling time.) Western forms of government, business, education have been adopted by only a small segment of the population, the elite in the cities. Chinese people and Indians do most of the business; until the present independence, Vietnamese office

workers were often imported by the French because the Lao were so uninterested in Government employment; education is traditionally in the hands of the Buddhist monks.

Christianity has made no impact whatsoever on the Lao, and this goes for Catholicism as well as Protestant Christianity. The handful of Lao converts consists almost entirely of marginal people - someone whose mother was Vietnamese, or someone who has been rejected by the Lao as being possessed by a Phi Poop, a spirit which is declared to enter some individuals and control them. (Some of these cases of Phi Poop are obviously pathological. In other cases the accused is the victim of witch-hunting. But in any event he is usually driven out of his community and is cut off from normal social intercourse.)

The Lao temperament shows very little anxiety, very little stress. Westerners consider the Lao improvident. When Point-Four aid was trying to set up a pilot program on the use of fertilizer, Lao farmers were much impressed with the yield of adequately fertilized crops. Orders for fertilizer were below expectations, however. The Lao had estimated how much acreage it would take to produce the same amount of fertilized rice as they had previously produced without more than haphazard fertilization, and were reducing their area under cultivation to produce the same crop rather than increase their yield. From the standpoint of their lack of anxiety, they are the closest to the old stereotype of the idyllic 'simple life of the "primitive" of any group I have seen. The Lao are, of course, by no means "primitive." Their culture level is more that of a folk culture.

Culture B: The Khmu

In contrast to the Lao, the Khmu are a minority group of mountain-dwelling people with no political importance. Their culture is more that of a tribal "primitive" culture although they have learned a great deal

from the Lao. They are not Buddhists. They are poorer than the Lao, and have traditionally been considered slaves of the latter. They put up little resistance, although the Lao take every possible advantage of them.

Whereas the Lao show a high degree of internal integration in their culture, the Khmu show signs of deterioration and disintegration. The gongs and jars of tremendous value which are characteristic of tribal peoples in southeast Asia, and which are remembered as a part of Khmu culture of the past, are virtually gone. In all of southeast Asia these gongs and jars are a focal point of interest in the culture. They are symbols of prestige and wealth. The fact that they have disappeared among the Khmu, and that apparently nothing has replaced them, is certainly of significance.

I cannot state for certain the causes of the deterioration of Khmu culture. I suspect that generations of pressure and domination by the Lao is a factor. Some of the results, however, are very obvious. There is less zest for life among the Khmu than among other peoples of similar culture in the area. Their general attitude is one of resignation, of apathy. They have a collective feeling of inferiority to the Lao and to the West. These remarks are possibly more true of the Khmu in the western than in the eastern part of the country.

The first Khmu converts to Christianity were made a generation ago by the same missionaries who were itinerating among the Lao. Through the years, particularly since the last war, the number of Khmu converts has grown appreciably. They were reached through the Laotian language and through their own student preachers who preached in Khmu but studied in Lao. Latest figures are not available to me, but an estimate of two thousand Khmu Christians is probably a safe one.

The tradition of the mission in the area has been strongly paternalistic, and the Christian Khmu have accepted that paternalism with real gratitude. They look

on both God and the missionary as powerful protection against an unfair and capricious world of the Lao, sickness, and even the elements. Some of the missionaries have been disturbed over the fact that Khmu Christians were so dependent on the mission, and have made changes to enforce more independence and self-reliance on the church in the more superficial respects of finance and internal government. These changes have been a real source of anxiety to the Khmu. Mission attitudes remain essentially paternalistic, however, and the dislocation will probably not be serious. The big problem remains: how to present the Gospel to the Khmu in a way that will be relevant to their need for security in their dying culture, and yet build for a "responsible Christianity" among them.

Culture C: The Miao

The third ethnic group to be mentioned here is a relative newcomer to Laos. The Miao (called Meo in Indochina) are moving by the thousands out of south China into northern Vietnam and Laos, and on into Thailand. In contrast to the easy-going Lao, and the apathetic Khmu, the Miao are vigorous, aggressive, and purposeful. New things which they meet through culture contact they meet with amusement, wonder and delight. I have repeatedly observed both Miao and Khmu people as they come in contact with a sample of the West - a missionary home, the missionary plane, a missionary and his air mattress, clothes, etc., or missionary children. The Khmu stand at a respectful distance and look. The Miao exclaim and laugh, poke and ask questions and make comments, their faces beaming with delight.

The Miao women do excellent needlework, which is lavished on the woman's costume. The folklore is rich, though material culture in most other things than clothing is poorer than that of the Lao and just as poor as that of the Khmu. Many Miao have wealth through opium growing, and many would rather buy their rice than grow it. As a rule several people in a village are addicted

to opium smoking.

There are signs that Miao culture is undergoing transition, and in a state of stress. For one thing, they have changed within just a few years from being an exclusive group, one which avoided contact with other peoples, one which stayed on its mountain peaks and never came into the valleys where the Lao are, to a people which, though it does not like the valleys, moves freely through them, trades freely in Lao towns, and has even taken an important commercial place in the town of Xieng Khouang.

The biggest sign of change in the Miao, however, is in relation to its response to Christianity. For years the Christian witness made no impression on the Miao. Then, suddenly, in the space of a month in 1949 about a thousand converts were made. Today there are several thousand Miao Christians. Furthermore, occasionally "prophets" declare themselves to be Jesus. So far none of these splinter movements has become widespread, but they are symptomatic of the fact that the Miao are undergoing a period of cultural reformulation which was triggered and given its particular form by the Christian gospel.

This is not the place to describe the Miao revival in detail. That should be done for Practical Anthropology by someone who was closer to the movement and who knew the Miao more than I did. In relation to the subject of this paper, however, there are some observations which should be made. The relation between the mission and the Miao Christians has never been as paternalistic as in the Khmu case. This is partly because of the good sense of some missionaries who disliked the paternalistic role, but it is also due to the fact that the Miao do not feel so strongly the need for such complete supervision. When given half a chance, they take the initiative.

Once they are Christians, the Miao are vigorous,

aggressive witnesses. The missionaries (their communication problem compounded by the distances and the ruggedness of the mountain trails) can never quite keep up with the new converts. It is not unusual for a whole village of 50 - 100 people, or the major portion of a village, to "enter Jesus" at the same time and send a messenger to the missionary to ask, "What do we do next?"

"Revitalization" of Culture

In a recent article Wallace² has spoken of five stages which comprise the cycle of a "revitalization process" in culture - that is, the stages in a culture transformation which is not of the slow, "normal" chain-reaction type in which new element A is introduced and is gradually assimilated, causing changes in C and D, which in turn affect E and F and G, but rather a culture transformation which affects a whole system or an important part of a cultural system rather suddenly and rather completely. Some of the different types of such "revitalization processes" are "nativistic movements," "reform movements," "cargo cult," "religious revival," "messianic movement," "utopian community," "sect formation," "mass movement," "social movement," "revolution," etc.³

Wallace's five stages are: 1. Steady State, 2. Period of Individual Stress, 3. Period of Cultural Distortion, 4. Period of Revitalization, and 5. New Steady State. The Lao are clearly in a steady state. Needs are satisfied by present patterns, on the whole. Stresses are not severe. Innovations have not produced bad dislocations. Potentially a danger point will be the growth of a city such as Vientiane. The stresses between an essentially rural culture and an urban development may cause trouble but they are at present met without serious difficulty.

The Khmu, it seems to me, represent a period of cultural distortion, in terms of Wallace's formulation. The distortion is of long standing, I believe, and it is

manifested now in what he characterizes as "disillusionment with the mazeway [traditional patterns of reaction as perceived by the individual member of the society] and apathy towards problems of adaptation." This is a different way from which other peoples will react to distortion. In some groups it may mean violence, in others a disregard for traditional mores, in others irresponsibility. To the Khmu it means an uneasy resignation. There is no sign of the beginning of a period of revitalization among the Khmu. Some individual Khmu have been assimilated to Lao life. Khmu villages nearest the Lao centers have adapted somewhat to Lao patterns. Christians have sought escape through dependency on a mission and on God.

Whether present developments among the Miao represent completely a period of cultural distortion, or whether there may be in the Christian movement something of a revitalization tendency, would be an evaluation which someone who knows the situation better than I would have to make. It seems to me that there are signs of both. The sudden and widespread acceptance of Christianity certainly has produced disparities with former habits, and presents inconsistencies. In a large percentage of cases, however, these conflicts have been settled on the basis of what the individual Christians felt the Christian reaction should be. This was, in many cases, influenced by the direct teaching of missionaries and their students.

Wallace maintains that a period of revitalization almost always begins with a particular prophet or leader from whom the major ideas of the new reformulation stem. There is no such figure in the Miao Christian community. As offshoots of it some have started up (often calling themselves Jesus, as was remarked above), but they have been abortive. I am not convinced that revitalization of such a community could not occur in a Christian context without such a local prophet.⁴

The Miao movement could easily develop nativistic

tendencies as happened with the Karen of Burma, so many of whom are Christians. Miao Christians do feel a sense of solidarity. They want their language in written form but the Lao government has been opposed to such a development. The Miao have revolted before. They have an increasing self-consciousness.

That, sketchily and imperfectly, is the picture of three cultures among whom one mission is working, usually through one language (Lao) and interpreters. The Scriptures and some (very little) Christian literature exist in Lao. The translation of the Bible is poor, and is in the process of revision.

The Church and the Cultures of Laos

Because of these vastly different pictures, the problems which remain for church and mission working together are vastly different in the three cases. In the Lao case the problem is still one of basic communication. Apparently the Gospel has never been made to seem relevant to the Lao. I feel deeply that a careful study should be made of the communication of the Gospel in relation to the Lao culture in the way that the Reyburns have been pioneering in South America.⁵ How can the Good News be made to seem good - to be something that people will really want - in this culture which does not, on the whole, see other needs than those met by its normal experience? Here the problem is not primarily one of language mastery. The missionaries are no worse than the average, and some are much better than the average, for missionary language-learning. The communication problems here are cultural ones. They are doubtless the same problems as the ones which face Christianity in Thailand, where the people are much the same, and where results in terms of response to the Gospel have been meager.

For the Khmu a part of the problem is to encourage them to find the security they need in God without an unhealthy dependency on the mission. A few individual

Khmu (but not the Christian Khmu community as a whole) have found a new purpose in life in their Christian faith. We would like to see a revitalization of Khmu culture, centered in a faith in Christ as Lord. There is danger that the mission might fight any such revitalization, because inevitably it would not take the form which missionaries unthinkingly would feel it should take. A vital Khmu Christianity, rooted in Khmu culture, cannot be anything but strikingly different from imported American Christianity in its form, although its dedication to its Lord may be just as significant, if not more so, than ours.

The great problem of missionary anthropology among the Khmu, then, is to so understand the Khmu that the mission can adapt to, cooperate with, and stimulate Khmu forms of growth. Of course the Khmu need the Scriptures in their own language. Of course they need missionary teaching in their tongue. But the Khmu language is not enough. Christianity, if it is to become truly significant among the Khmu must find a significant place in Khmu life. Perhaps the terms "self-support" and "self-government" should not be used with the Khmu, for they promote stress and anxiety, but some Khmu way must be found to divert the Khmu dependency on the mission.

For the Miao a major part of the problem is to guide tactfully, and to provide the bases for greater growth in non-autocratic teaching, the development of literacy and literature, the encouragement of Miao forms of worship, and of a Miao Christian culture. One tremendous problem is the training of Miao leadership in a way that will be compatible with Miao leadership patterns, but still be strongly oriented Biblically and in the broader Christian tradition.

As God injects himself into human history - in the Incarnation, in the Revelation of the Bible, in the redemption of any individual - He uses human culture as His means of revelation, and human beings respond to Him in their own cultural manner. As cultures differ,

responses differ, and a man is no more at home in a culture form which does not meet his needs than he is in a language which is foreign to him. Christian anthropology can do much to help the missionary watch the Khmu or the Miao, or even the Lao, respond to redemption in his own way, to worship God in his own way, to participate in the Church in his own way, and watch them with sympathy, understanding and encouragement, rather than with the compulsion to force our western-ness on them to the poverty of the Kingdom of God.

This article is not an example of such an "understanding." It is merely a statement of some of the more obvious problems in one particular situation. Understanding of this kind is not arrived at without careful, perceptive, and sympathetic study of each of the cultural situations involved - the particular missionary culture, and the particular cultures in which the Church is being planted.

NOTES

1. On Responsible Christianity, see William D. Reyburn, The Toba Indians of the Argentine Chaco, (Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1711 Prairie St., Elkhart, Indiana; 1954) p. 58.
2. Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," American Anthropologist 58.264-275.
3. Ibid, p. 264.
4. Reyburn, op. cit., p. 46.
5. Ibid. See also the articles by Dr. and Mrs. Reyburn in past issues of PA.

BOOK REVIEWS -- A STATEMENT OF POLICY

Beginning with this issue, Practical Anthropology's review of anthropological literature is to be conducted as a regular department with three sections: Book reviews; book notices, brief observations on current books and periodical literature of importance; and "books received" for review, merely listed so as to overcome the inevitable lag between publication and review.

The Book Reviews editor would invite subscribers who are interested in receiving books for review to write him indicating their willingness to write reviews, and their field of particular interest and training. The editor will then select reviewers according to the books received.

Subscribers are also urged to recommend to the editor literature which comes to their notice which should be reviewed in these pages. This is very important since the department should grow to serve the interests and needs of everyone.

The review of anthropological literature is to be kept as nearly as possible in line with the purposes and needs of Practical Anthropology readers. Literature of peripheral interest will receive notice in the Notes.

All correspondence concerning book reviews should be addressed to the Book Reviews editor, c/o Department of Anthropology, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois.

NOTES AND NEWS

Hartford Communications Conference

The Kennedy School of Missions sponsored a conference on "Language Preparation and the Communication of the Gospel" in Hartford, April 26-28. Participants were

mission board secretaries from several denominations, representatives of missionary personnel committees, missionary schools, and several linguists. The latter included Maurice Hohlfeld, H. A. Gleason, and William Welmers of the Kennedy School of Missions, Ben Elson and Howard McKaughan of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Earl Stevick of Scarrit College, Eugene Nida and William Smalley of the American Bible Society. The conference explored such relevant problems as present language-training programs, training before going to the field, the role of linguistics in language training, etc.

Linguistic Conferences for Outgoing Missionaries

The Toronto Institute of Linguistics, which has been mentioned in the pages of Practical Anthropology, will be held this year from June 1-29. Staff for the month will be C. Douglas Ellis, William Gage, R. S. Jeanes, Margaret Hoffman, and William Smalley. Eugene Nida will be there for the last week.

At Allegheny College in Meadville, Pa., the Personnel Committee of the International Missionary Council will have the linguistic portion of its outgoing missionary conference from July 16-27. This year's session is under the direction of Eugene Nida, with J. Maurice Hohlfeld, Ralph Winter, Charles and Marguerite Kraft participating, as well as Gage, Hoffman, and Smalley of the TIL staff.

The purpose of each of these sessions is to give the outgoing missionary some slight linguistic orientation and some learning skills to help him with his future language-learning job. The work includes phonetics, elementary study of some linguistic principles, and an introduction to the latest developments in language-learning techniques.

Two New Ph.D's

On May 17, 1956, Ben Elson passed his final oral examination for the Ph.D. degree under the Linguistics

Department of Cornell University. His dissertation was a grammar of Sierra Popoluca (Mexico). The Elsons will be teaching at the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Norman, Oklahoma, this summer, and will return to Bible translation work in Mexico this fall.

On May 23, 1956, William Smalley followed Ben's example in the Anthropology Department of Columbia University. His dissertation was a grammar of Khmu' (Laos, Indochina).

NEW SUBSCRIBERS

We Need New Subscriptions

The cost of Multilithing Practical Anthropology in the New York area is going to be more than it was in Oregon. The same proportion of labor will be volunteered or subsidized, but total costs are higher because printing is higher. If we are to break even (as PA did last year) we will need more subscribers. If you would like to give five or ten (or more or less) gift subscriptions to PA you could help us with this problem and at the same time spread the influence and usefulness of the journal. We would be glad to receive your remittance for gift subscriptions with or without designated names for them. We can supply the names of missionaries whom we think might be interested in PA, and we will inform them that their subscription was made possible through a gift from you. We hope that many of these will continue with their own subscriptions when your gift subscription expires.

We would like to suggest to the teachers of Anthropology among our readers that they encourage their students to subscribe as a way of keeping them in some slight touch with the field of anthropology and with some of the Christians working in the discipline, or interested in it. Whatever anyone can do to help increase our circulation would be of tremendous help.